



SUCCESS THROUGH OUR EYES
A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



BRANDON
UNIVERSITY

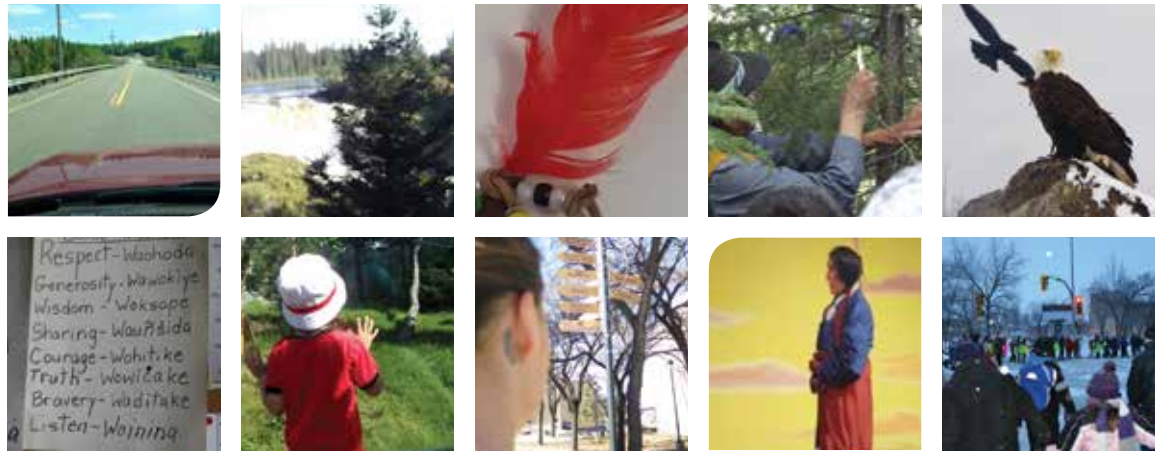
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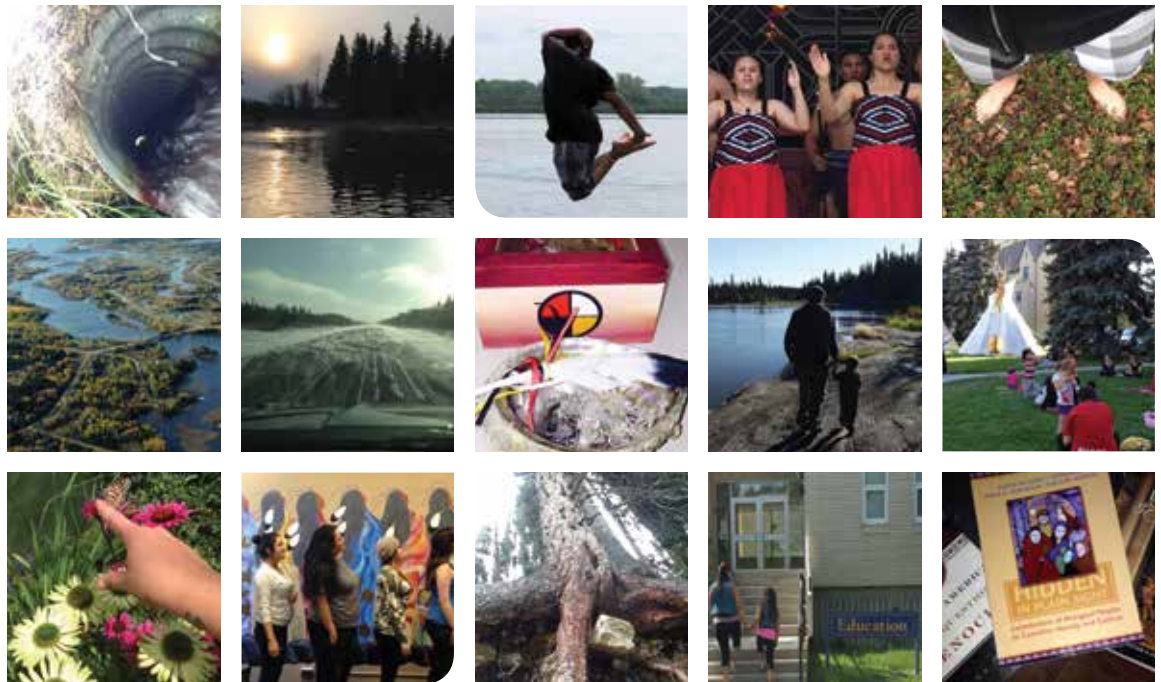
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This project is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by Vale and Manitoba Hydro.



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INDIGENOUS YOUTH LEADERS

Brandee Albert – Norway House Cree Nation, Manitoba

Harley Beaulieu – Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation, Manitoba

Dale Carlson – Northlands Band Lac Brochet, Manitoba

Carla Cochrane – Fisher River Cree Nation, Manitoba

Ashley Harper – Red Sucker Lake, Manitoba

Jessica Murray – Norway House Cree Nation, Manitoba

Erin Paupanekis – Norway House Cree Nation, Manitoba

Greg Personius – Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Manitoba

Jeremy Sinclair – Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Manitoba

Julia Stoneman Sinclair – Lynn Lake, Manitoba

BRANDON UNIVERSITY COLLABORATORS

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Christiane Ramsey – Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies

Karen Rempel – Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies

PREFACE

This booklet, *Success Through Our Eyes*, is the outcome of a photovoice research process and youth forum involving researchers from Brandon University and Indigenous youth leaders from around Manitoba. The project was sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Brandon University, Vale and Manitoba Hydro.

Photovoice research is a community-based participatory research process that combines photo images and text to present community or individual perspectives. In this project, Indigenous youth from communities across Manitoba use photos and stories to give us their unique stories about educational success and leadership, as well as Aboriginal culture. These youth were also participants in an Indigenous Youth Forum on leadership and educational success held in Brandon, Manitoba in February 2015.

With this booklet, we continue to share their stories by integrating the medium of photography with narratives that describe the influences in their life that have helped them achieve educational success and youth leadership.

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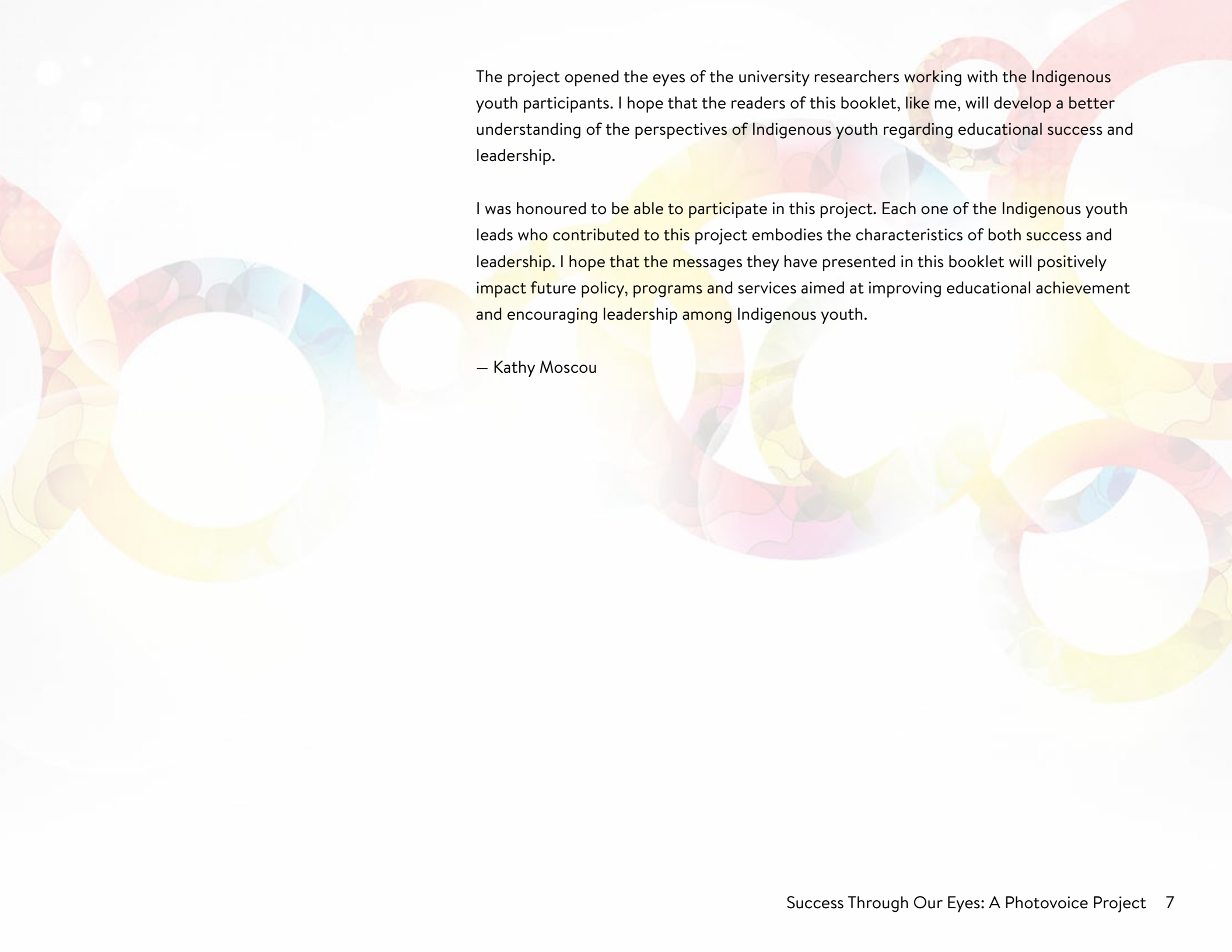
EMPOWERING PARTNERSHIPS

Success Through Our Eyes is a research project that was designed by Indigenous youth to tell their story of success and leadership and to gather the perspectives of other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth. Photovoice was selected for this research project because it enabled the participant researchers to determine the subject of their photographs and to describe the meaning in their own voice (Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008).

In the pictorial life journeys shown in this booklet, I see stories of empowerment, cultural identity, self-reflection and resilience. Jessica Murray's photograph, *Making Your Own Path*, depicts a crossroads in which Indigenous youth must decide their life journey. She shares her story of empowerment through re-discovering her cultural heritage. Similarly, Julia Stoneman Sinclair's photograph, *Identity in Education*, describes the importance of student empowerment to success.

Erin Paupanekis' photograph, *Within Arms's Reach*, is a reminder to reflect on the importance of patience in achieving success. Harley Beaulieu's photograph, *Everyone Walks With Their Own Feather*, tells a story of resilience. He shares his story with the younger generation so they will continue working toward success, despite obstacles in their path.

I believe that the *Success Through Our Eyes* project achieved the goals for community-based research that (1) assists individuals with recording and reflecting on community issues and (2) encourages group dialogue on these issues (Wang, 2005). The project also achieved the goal of two-way learning by community-university research partners.



The project opened the eyes of the university researchers working with the Indigenous youth participants. I hope that the readers of this booklet, like me, will develop a better understanding of the perspectives of Indigenous youth regarding educational success and leadership.

I was honoured to be able to participate in this project. Each one of the Indigenous youth leads who contributed to this project embodies the characteristics of both success and leadership. I hope that the messages they have presented in this booklet will positively impact future policy, programs and services aimed at improving educational achievement and encouraging leadership among Indigenous youth.

– Kathy Moscou

GREG PERSONIUS A LONELY HIGHWAY

I was thinking about this for some time now. Each and every one of us has paths in life. We go through hard times and good times. Lately I've been forgetting about the positive things in life. Depression is out there and it's never going away. We can make our own roads and paths we want to go down. They can have the biggest hills or the smallest hills, but no matter what, we are going over them.

When I took this picture I thought, "I am going down this path for a reason." I am leaving the negative thoughts behind me and driving on a positive path that was made for me. I am going to a place that makes me happy and going home to a family. My family means so much to me, my parents, brothers, sister, nephews, nieces, aunts and uncles, and friends. We might not see our families a lot but they are there. We support one another and always will. So remember, whatever road or path you're on, it's just going to get even better. Remember where you're going and always remember who you are. You are unique and no one is perfect.





DALE CARLSON
IDENTITY REFLECTION
STARTS IN YOUTH

The water takes its own pathway
downstream in a powerful, moving force.

As I was taking my son for a walk, we stopped to watch the waterfalls from a safe distance. I was teaching him about how the water system works, and how nature and all the animals depend on it. I wanted to grow his hair long so that he would walk with pride knowing his Indigenous background while living in an ever-changing world. I hope that my son will also carry a strong will on his pathway to success.

HARLEY BEAULIEU
EVERYONE WALKS WITH
THEIR OWN FEATHER

Here is a little something I was taught and now I want to share it with all of you. I hope to share it with our younger generations as well. It goes something like this:

Everyone walks their own feather. Like the spine on the tip of a feather, at first, your path may be narrow and hard to find. The barbs on either side of the spine represent the things that can slow you down like the obstacles in your path. Each person has different lessons they must learn in order to walk their own feather and overcome those obstacles.

At times you may get pulled off your path and stay longer than imagined in a situation that causes discomfort. When you learn the lesson associated with personal growth, you will find your way back to your own path, or spine of your feather. Then, you walk a little further and are pulled off again. This time you do not stay off your path as long. By the time you have travelled halfway down your feather, your path becomes wider and easier to walk.

Towards the end of the hollow shaft, where the after feather or soft fluff occurs, things may get a little fuzzy; and then your spirit soars. By the time you travel from adolescence to adulthood, the negative things that may have once influenced you no longer have a hold. Once you apply this to yourself, you are free to share it with others. This belongs to all people.

The reason I took this photo is because the story that is attached to it can be used by anyone to achieve success. Everyone has their own idea of what success is, and when we apply this to ourselves, success can and will come our way. We can help others achieve success as well.



DALE CARLSON AN ELDER'S KNOWLEDGE

Teaching outside of the classroom creates opportunities for the student and teacher to get to know each other in greater depth. It provides an opportunity to see the world differently.

I took this picture as part of the land-based workshop on medicine picking during a summer camp for First Nations youth in Thompson, Manitoba. Our local Elder was showing the youth how to identify certain trees and what the bark could be used for. These teachings integrated the oral teachings of the past, with the presence of being in the forest and creating a classroom of learning. We need to go back to our roots and find out who we are before we can move forward.



ASHLEY HARPER LIKE AN EAGLE

When it storms, most birds seek shelter and hide until the storm passes. Instead of hiding, the eagle is the only bird that avoids the storm by flying above the clouds. If the storms in your life are trying to pull you down, fight against them by flying higher and stronger towards success. You may never know who you'll inspire to fly higher with you.

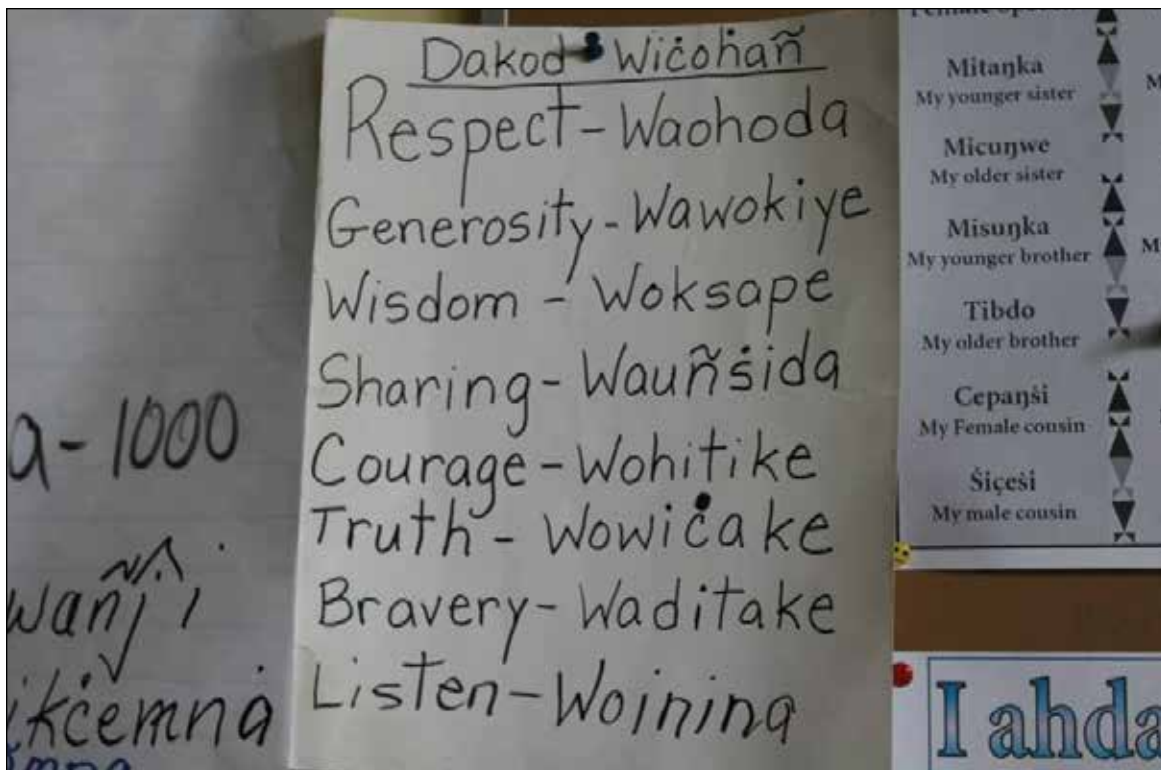
The reason why I took this picture was because of the following saying I heard about eagles, "Most birds seek shelter and hide as the storm passes. Instead of hiding, the eagle is the only bird that avoids the storm by flying above the clouds." This eagle seemed like the perfect picture to take about leadership and educational success. The raven behind the eagle is a smaller bird. It symbolizes those who will seek shelter and hide without dealing with the storms in their lives. As for the eagle, it is one of the strongest birds, strong enough to fly above the clouds. It symbolizes those who have been through many storms, but rather than letting the storm push them down, they fly above the storm and become stronger. The flight of the raven around the eagle symbolizes youth who are inspired and motivated by those who fight through the storms. The eagle doesn't know the raven is behind him, symbolizing how we often don't notice those who are admiring us from afar. We don't notice who we might be inspiring to keep fighting through the storms of life and to never give up in the flight toward success!



CARLA COCHRANE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

It is important to learn our language as it helps strengthen our identity, our culture, and our nations. Our languages were almost extinguished. The strength of our ancestors has kept them alive, and it is now our responsibility to revitalize them. Language is an important part of our culture. Building our identity through culture helps to strengthen our foundation to succeed in the journeys we embark on in life.

I took this picture in a classroom from a Dakota community. The young ones were learning their language as part of their program. It highlights one of the ways in which language is being taught to the younger generation.



DALE CARLSON CURIOSITY

Effective leaders have the ability to consistently move themselves and others to action. They understand the invisible forces that shape us.

I was watching my son stare intently into this animal enclosure. I couldn't help but think if it was out of curiosity, fascination, or if it was something else. At five years old, could he have the thought processes necessary to wonder why the animal was caged for viewers to see? Or maybe he was fascinated to see a creature so different from the normality of every day. Either way, I believe that this experience has given him a sense of wonder and encouraged him to explore the unknown.



THOUGHTFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT EQUITY

Success Through Our Eyes: A Photovoice Project provides a positive example of how individual stories can create change. I work as an educational psychologist and teach inclusive education in a small faculty of education in Southwestern Manitoba. All of the magnificent stories and images in *Success Through Our Eyes* are about individual journeys towards identity and culturally proficient living. In all of my courses, I have three conversations about equity. The first conversation encourages us to question how we know what we know and to be aware of how inequity has been a part of our lived experience through social and historical factors. The second conversation asks us to be thoughtful, and to critique power and privilege in our interactions with others. The third conversation speaks to the importance of becoming an activist for social justice change. *Success Through Our Eyes* is bountiful with examples of each of these three teachings.

We have so much to learn from the voices of our young adults. Their conversations with us, and the pictures as metaphors, speak about their own leadership journeys towards finding their own version of equity in a world all too often anchored in racism. The authors speak about their own personal transformations towards knowing their cultural identity. These young adults are keenly aware of injustice and are actively working to challenge inequity for the sake of future generations. They are also activists working to dismantle old stereotypes about what it means to be Indigenous and a young adult today. There is no question that these young adults are confident about who they are and where they wish to go in life. I am very grateful to have been able to be a part of these beautiful journeys from our future leaders and I look forward to reading about the participants' future successes.

– Chris Brown

ERIN PAUPANEKIS
FAR AWAY PLACES

Educational success requires that we work hard for our achievements, but it also requires that we stay true to who we are. Sometimes we find ourselves far away from home. If we look around, we can always find a little reminder of our culture and where we come from.

I took this picture because I think having a strong work ethic and studying are necessary to succeed in post-secondary studies. This picture symbolizes the best of both worlds for me: having the opportunity to attend graduate school, and having that piece of culture be there with me when I am far from home. Personally, I think in order to be successful in such a diverse environment, we have to stay true to who we are. We need to keep that identity and hold on to it. It is that support system I need to succeed.





JESSICA MURRAY MAKING YOUR OWN PATH

Everyone makes wrong turns, gets lost, and has to find their way again. Remembering who you are will help you make the right choices in life that will lead you to where you belong. Leadership is making your own path and ultimately reaching your happiness, whatever that may be.

I took this picture because I feel like I have become a leader through working hard and achieving success in my education. I also found myself during my time at university. Growing up I was never sure of my First Nations identity, and I found this part of me there. Discovering this part of me has only encouraged me to reach my full potential and to lead myself onto the right path.

MEANING MAKING

What we choose to take pictures of says something about who we are. The Indigenous youth leaders involved in this photographic project have found ways of depicting the world that tell the stories that are meaningful to them. But these depictions, once in the public sphere and interpreted by others, are able to influence the participants' own initial understandings. While each photo is a public artifact, each is also both a representation of the intent of the artist, and an influencer on the ideas of the artist. What is out there becomes real in a way that ideas in the mind, alone, cannot be. As a public artifact, meaning can be differently constituted.

This project provided an opportunity for Indigenous youth to get together and share ideas on the concept of success, broadly interpreted. Taking pictures gave another kind of voice to ideas of what constituted success; hearing other participants' understandings and interpretations gave the artists an opportunity to see how the images they chose to depict affected others, and to see if their ideas "worked." This was about finding and articulating voice through engaging with a photographic medium. And this idea, of finding and articulating voice, applies to all aspects of being a young, Indigenous person today.

— Chris Beeman



JULIA STONEMAN SINCLAIR
IDLE NO MORE

Education and leadership can be gained in the most unlikely of places. In Brandon, MB, on the busiest intersection in the city, the youth came together to educate others on the value of Mother Earth. Young leaders united people from all nations in friendship, standing for what they believed in.

I took this picture during the Idle No More round dance that was held on 18th Street and Victoria Avenue in Brandon, MB. This picture symbolizes the coming together of people for awareness, peace, and friendship. Most importantly, it shows that these people all genuinely care about one another and Mother Earth. This picture represents educational success and leadership, because this gathering was put together by the youth of Brandon to let the public know that they want to unite us all in protecting our earth. This round dance raised awareness and allowed people to ask questions about our history and what we were standing for. It gave others an opportunity to come together in a fun, peaceful way and create relationships that can ignite positive change going forward.

DALE CARLSON INTO THE UNKNOWN

The light at the end of a tunnel is a mystery, but we know there is life on the other side.

I think this picture represents life. It is evident in the water rapidly rushing towards us. It would be a struggle to fight with these currents, but perhaps some things are just meant to be. Maybe the people who created this tunnel needed this water to rush through to support something else. Maybe it was just water that was in the way for daily travelers to commute on the road above. Either way, when I took the picture I thought about how we must be like water and adapt to changes, even if we don't exactly know where those changes will take us.





BRANDEE ALBERT
MOTHER EARTH'S NURTURE

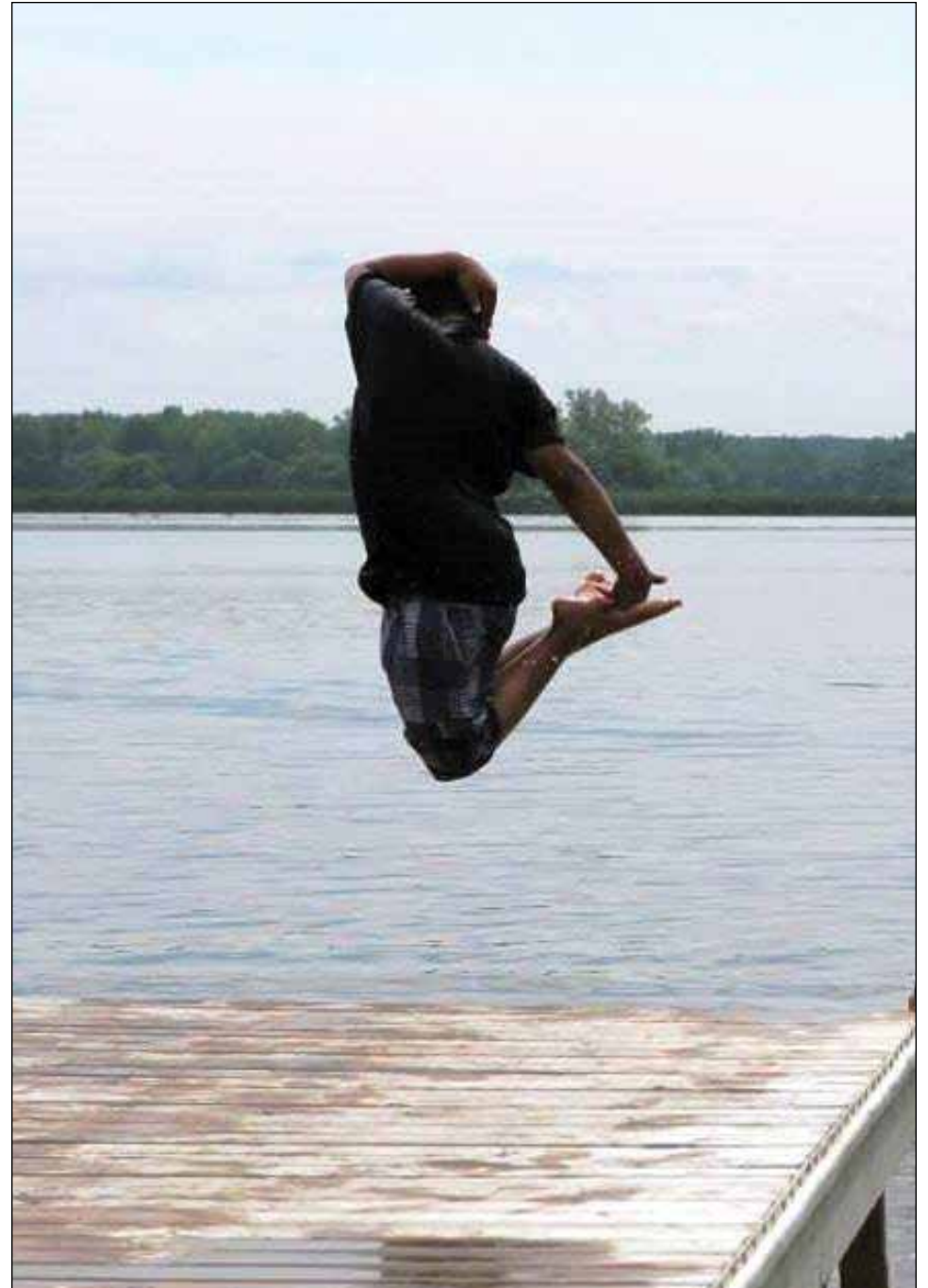
Mother Earth sets a beautiful foundation for our lives. She is always supporting, providing, encouraging, inspiring, and loving. The connection with Mother Earth is powerful, as she can help guide you to live your purposeful life.

The land set a strong foundation for my livelihood. I have come to understand and appreciate the mutual relationship I have with Mother Earth. I have come to understand and gained traditional knowledge of my history, culture, and traditions. This has given me strength, motivation, and determination to lead a good life (“minopimatisiwin”). This good life includes a strong education that has led me to fulfill leadership roles and serve my purpose on Mother Earth. When you learn to respect the land and respect life, then your successes will flourish and lead you to your purposeful life.

CARLA COCHRANE
SOMETIMES WE HAVE NO
CHOICE BUT JUST TO DIVE
RIGHT IN...

Sometimes we might have a fear of the unknown.
We might fear failure even before we have tried.

This picture symbolizes that need to just jump in without letting our thoughts, fears, and attitudes get in the way. Often, this is the best way that results are achieved and the direction that we need to take in order to succeed.





JULIA STONEMAN SINCLAIR
MAORI INFLUENCE

Signs of success can come from your own backyard or from a country across the world. No matter where you go, look for that inspiration and you will find those that will support you.

I took this photo at the University of Auckland in Auckland, New Zealand, while I was attending a conference on Indigenous Research to present my thesis. These individuals are a group of Maori students who came together to practice and share their cultural dance and song. This shows how strong their culture is and that they did not have to give up their identity for their education. It gives others the opportunity to learn about who the Maori are and where they come from. I took this photo because it shows me how strong Aboriginal people can be and how we can support one another from anywhere in the world.



DALE CARLSON
PATHWAYS OF LIFE

Our feet carry us on many paths in life. Teaching and learning are a part of life experiences, and cannot be avoided. We do it whether we are aware or not. We continue to walk and create our own path of learning.

I wanted to show how close we can connect with nature by using a photo of my own feet against the grass. On the left side you can see the cable of the cell phone used to capture the photo. I didn't notice the cable until the photo was loaded onto my computer. I thought, "Oh darn, another picture capture ruined." In a world where our feet can take us on many paths, no matter how far we deepen ourselves in nature, our modern technologies are not far behind to distract us from the realness of nature.

CARLA COCHRANE
BROADENING PERSPECTIVES

Travelling helps to broaden our views on life. It's an opportunity to experience different communities, cultures, traditions, languages, and to meet new friends. It is a way to add to our own vault of knowledge and create memories.

I took this picture on a journey from a fly-in community in Manitoba. I had the opportunity to facilitate the training, meet great people, and tour the community. This picture symbolizes those memories and reminds me of my first experience in that particular community. The paths of the waters remind me of our paths in life. Our paths are not always laid out straight for us, and sometimes we venture off or hit barriers. If we keep going, we can succeed. We just need to look for alternate routes or break through the barriers.



DALE CARLSON BEING BRAVE: RIDING OUT THE STORM

We all see things differently in life, as we all have many roads. Choosing the ones less travelled can be somewhat of a gamble. It jeopardizes safety and assurance. You can get there by believing in and reassuring yourself, one moment at a time.

As I was travelling on this winter day, I began to wonder about the future. The sun was bright, the wind was gusting, and the roads were hazy from the blowing snow. I was mesmerized by the effect. As I was driving, struggling to remain centered and calm, I reassured myself that I would eventually reach my destination safely.





BRANDEE ALBERT FOUR SACRED MEDICINES: TOOLS IN MY JOURNEY

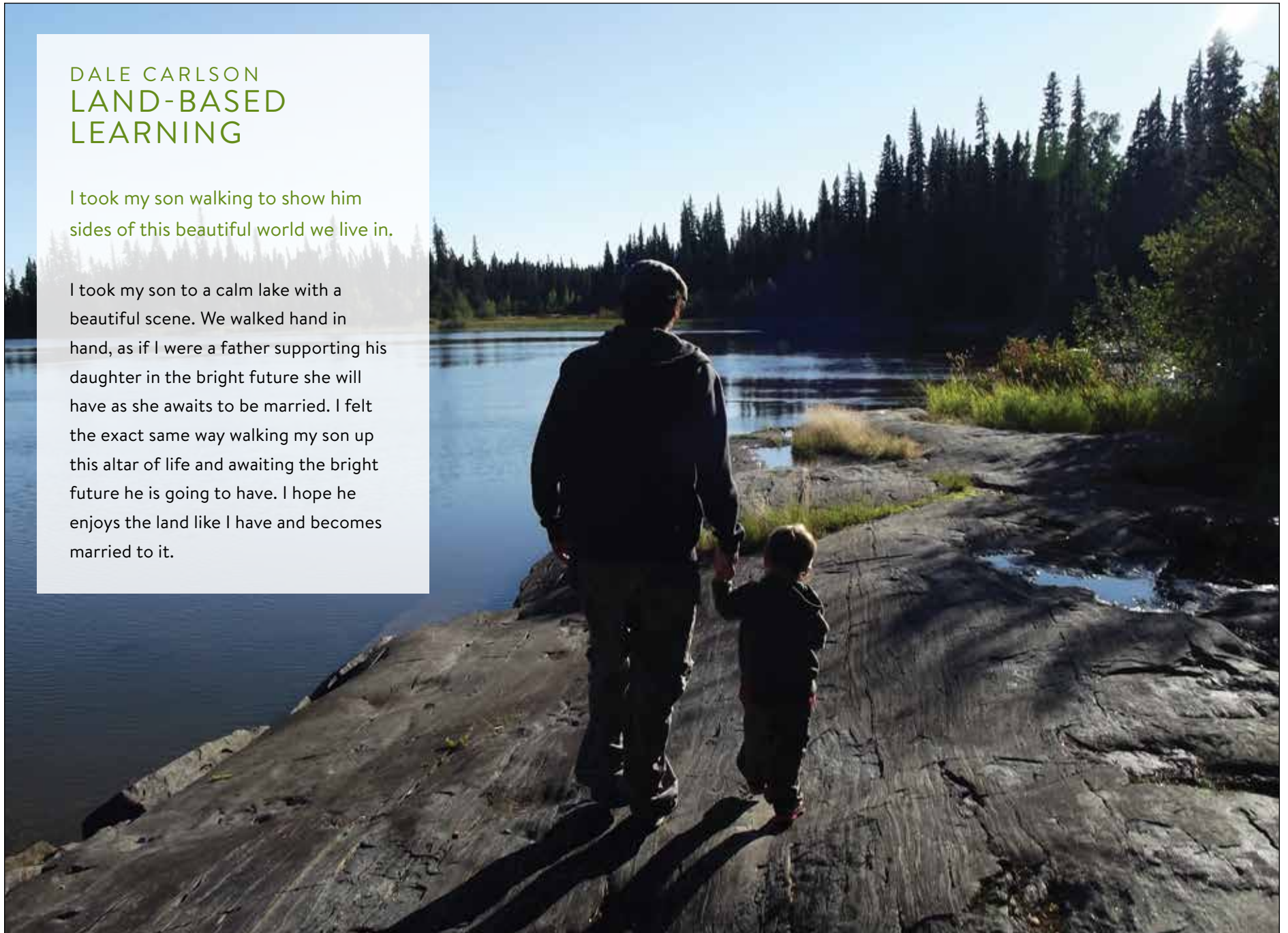
Culture and traditions help to create a balanced life when reaching for our dreams and striving towards success. Culture is identity, and when we strengthen our own identity, we create an avenue towards success, whether it's education, employment, and/or leadership.

This picture illustrates the culture of our First Nations people. It includes the four sacred medicines and a smudging bowl. This smudging ceremony helped me to bring mindfulness and balance into my life. It has provided an avenue to dispel any negativity that could have kept me from attaining my educational success. It gave me a positive outlook on life, and positive enlightenment in my heart and spirit.

DALE CARLSON LAND-BASED LEARNING

I took my son walking to show him sides of this beautiful world we live in.

I took my son to a calm lake with a beautiful scene. We walked hand in hand, as if I were a father supporting his daughter in the bright future she will have as she awaits to be married. I felt the exact same way walking my son up this altar of life and awaiting the bright future he is going to have. I hope he enjoys the land like I have and becomes married to it.





JULIA STONEMAN SINCLAIR
IDENTITY IN EDUCATION

Sometimes students need to be the educators
and show their teachers what they need to be
successful in whatever they do.

This picture shows our very first Aboriginal student orientation feast that was planned on campus for new students in September. We found that in previous years, orientations did not have the right resources for Aboriginal students. This picture shows the celebration of our successes in creating an orientation that caters to Aboriginal students. The tipis in the background and the hand drum singers show how the university is embracing our culture. The students with their families eating happily among their future professors shows that we can create a space here on campus that is comfortable for all students. We are helping them to keep their identity while they work towards being leaders for their own communities. Education is the most crucial tool for creating success among our youth. With that said, education must also incorporate the teachings of our people to create a mutual understanding and respect so that we can all move forward in the same direction.

ERIN PAUPANEKIS
WITHIN ARM'S REACH

Sometimes our goals are so close to us that we can reach out and touch them. Success means having the patience to achieve whatever it is we want to achieve.

I took this photo at the Assiniboine Zoo in Winnipeg, Manitoba, inside the butterfly enclosure. Whenever I would get close to a butterfly, it would fly away. I started to become a bit frustrated because I really wanted a butterfly to land on my finger. I sat in the enclosure for quite a while and reached out to this Monarch butterfly. Finally, the butterfly fluttered off its flower and onto my fingertip. Looking at this beautiful insect on my finger reminded me that patience is the key to most things in life, including achieving our goals and dreams. Our goals and dreams are always within arm's reach.





JULIA STONEMAN SINCLAIR IKWESENS

A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is finished, no matter how brave its warriors, or how strong their weapons. Our women's hearts will never be on the ground.

This painting was done by the students at Brandon University with the help of Jackie Traverse in our Indigenous Peoples Centre. The inspiration for this photo came from an Idle No More rally in Ottawa on Parliament Hill. While the rally was taking place, a few eagles flew over the people. The news cameras captured women in blankets looking up at the eagles. The students thought that the picture of these women looking up at the eagles represented the strength that we see in our people. They were beautiful, strong, educated women fighting for the rights of our land and always caring for our people. This is the type of inspiration we wanted to see every day in our centre. We want to display it for students as they work towards their goals and education to better themselves, their families, and communities.

DALE CARLSON TREE OF LIFE

Education is like planting a seed in the ground and nurturing it. The more education you nurture yourself with, the higher you become.

I took this photo of this gigantic tree simply because its features impressed me. As a child I loved climbing trees, especially this kind with its easy access branches, and given its height, I could probably have seen for miles in all directions. This tree was different from the rest, as it stood out by way of its roots. I believe the sediment was gradually breaking down. The rainfall was causing the sediment to slide down the cliff-side just a few feet behind me. Slowly this tree will become weak and frail as its root systems unfold beneath. I wanted to acknowledge the tree for all it was, for its height and its determination to stay standing. I noticed a rock or boulder lodged right in the root system. I wasn't sure if this occurred naturally, or if mankind had nailed it in as to somehow hold the tree upright like a wedge. I highly doubt the latter, and believe it to be limestone slowly deteriorating. One day this tree may fall, but until it does, it will remain tall and proud and remind me of climbing trees in my childhood.





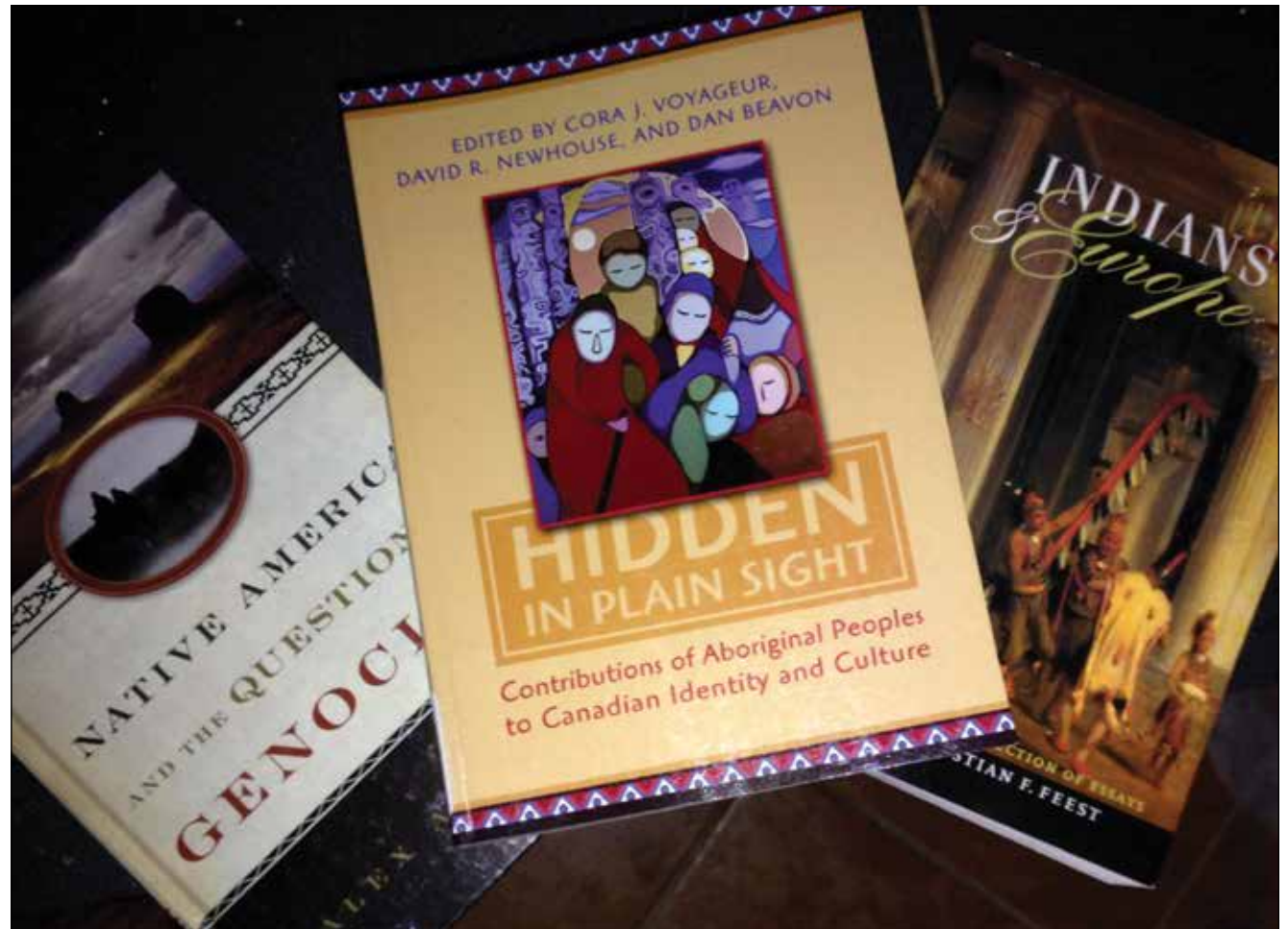
JESSICA MURRAY GUIDE THE WAY


Being a leader can come in many forms. One of the ways we can all be leaders is by being a positive role model for our children and youth. Providing the younger generation with guidance into a bright future with endless possibilities is one of the greatest gifts we can give.

I took this photo because I highly value education. I have many friends that have completed their schooling while raising children and who have provided their children with a positive role model to look up to. In my eyes, that's what being a leader is. This picture shows how the little girl is trying to emulate her role model, her mother, by dressing the same. Their hands being locked shows that the mother is guiding her daughter towards a positive future.

CARLA COCHRANE VALUE OF BOOKS

It is important to exercise our minds through reading and learning something new every day. By adding to our own vault of knowledge, we are expanding on what we do not know. Learning can inspire us to change personally, creating a ripple effect on those around us. When I imagine the bigger picture, in order to create change within the community, change has to start within.





When I travel in northern Manitoba, I am treated as an elder, too, and in fact I have been given a name. But I am experiencing shyness around that, now. Personal shyness. Once upon a time the eagles sought me out. But I grew to feel that I was a spiritual usurper. So I shut down my light dancing. My heart misses those experiences. This is my truth... And I don't know why I am telling you this, but Spirit says it is time to speak. Your writing has connected to my heart and thus to my Voice.

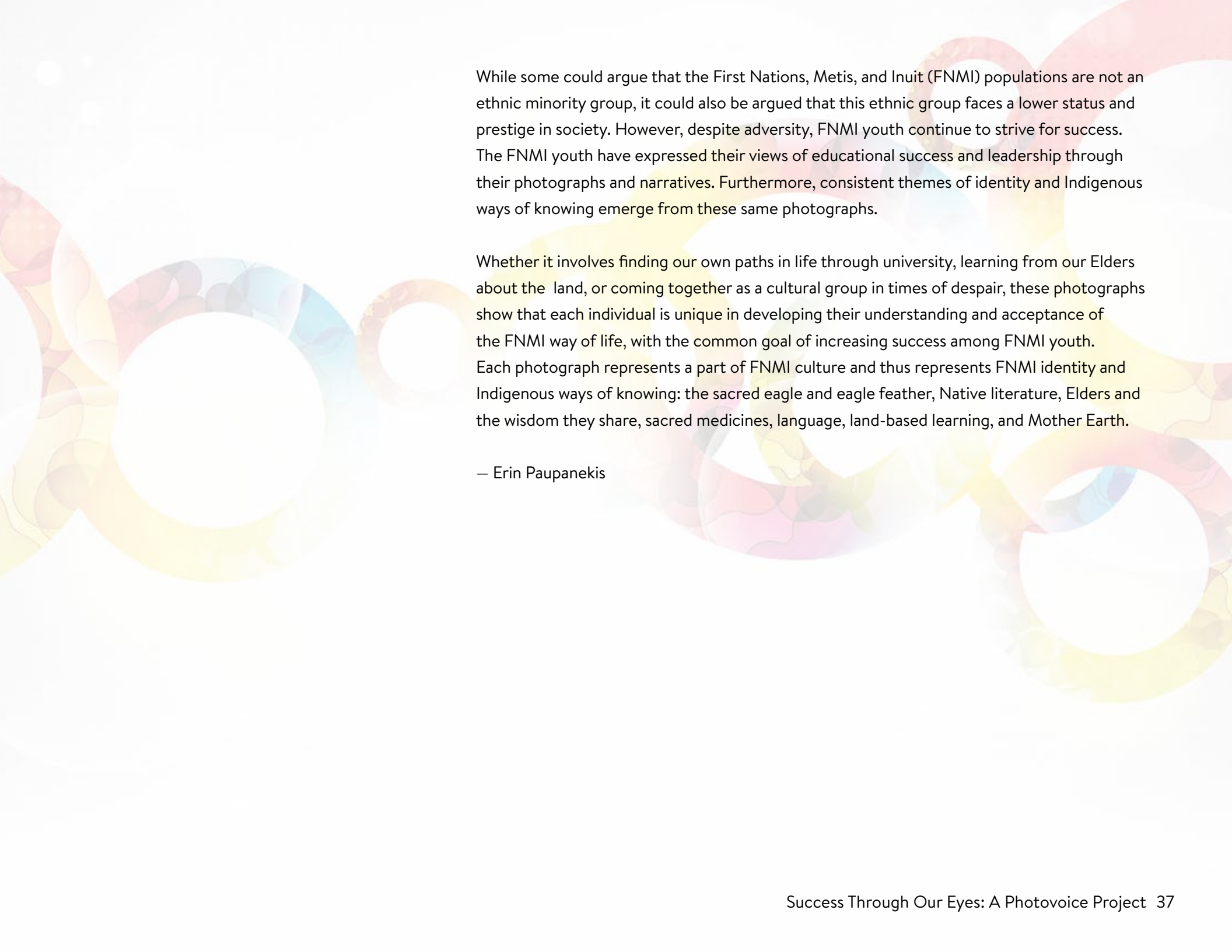
– Robin Enns, Dean Emeritus, Brandon University

OUR INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AND WAYS OF KNOWING

Ethnic identity has been conceptualized as a complex construct, one that includes a commitment and sense of belonging to one's group, positive evaluation of that group, interest in and knowledge about the group, and involvement in activities and traditions of the group (Phinney, 1990). Consistent with the concept of personal identity, ethnic identity refers to a sense of self, but it differs in that it involves a shared sense of identity with other members of the same ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

According to Phinney (1996), the study of ethnic identity involves an emphasis on how group members understand and interpret their own ethnicity. Phinney (1989) also maintained that it is vital to understand ethnic identity because it is implicated in the overall adjustment of minority group adolescents. For ethnic minorities, identity formation involves developing an understanding and acceptance of one's own group while facing a lower status and prestige in society and the presence of stereotypes and racism (Phinney, 1996).

Western and Indigenous ways of knowing differ considerably, with a tendency for Western education to emphasize compartmentalized knowledge taught in classrooms or laboratories, while the FNMI population have traditionally acquired knowledge through direct experience in the natural world (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). FNMI peoples have their own methods for classifying and transmitting knowledge: information, insight, and techniques are shared by Elders and passed down from one generation to another (Battiste, 2008).



While some could argue that the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) populations are not an ethnic minority group, it could also be argued that this ethnic group faces a lower status and prestige in society. However, despite adversity, FNMI youth continue to strive for success. The FNMI youth have expressed their views of educational success and leadership through their photographs and narratives. Furthermore, consistent themes of identity and Indigenous ways of knowing emerge from these same photographs.

Whether it involves finding our own paths in life through university, learning from our Elders about the land, or coming together as a cultural group in times of despair, these photographs show that each individual is unique in developing their understanding and acceptance of the FNMI way of life, with the common goal of increasing success among FNMI youth. Each photograph represents a part of FNMI culture and thus represents FNMI identity and Indigenous ways of knowing: the sacred eagle and eagle feather, Native literature, Elders and the wisdom they share, sacred medicines, language, land-based learning, and Mother Earth.

— Erin Paupanekis

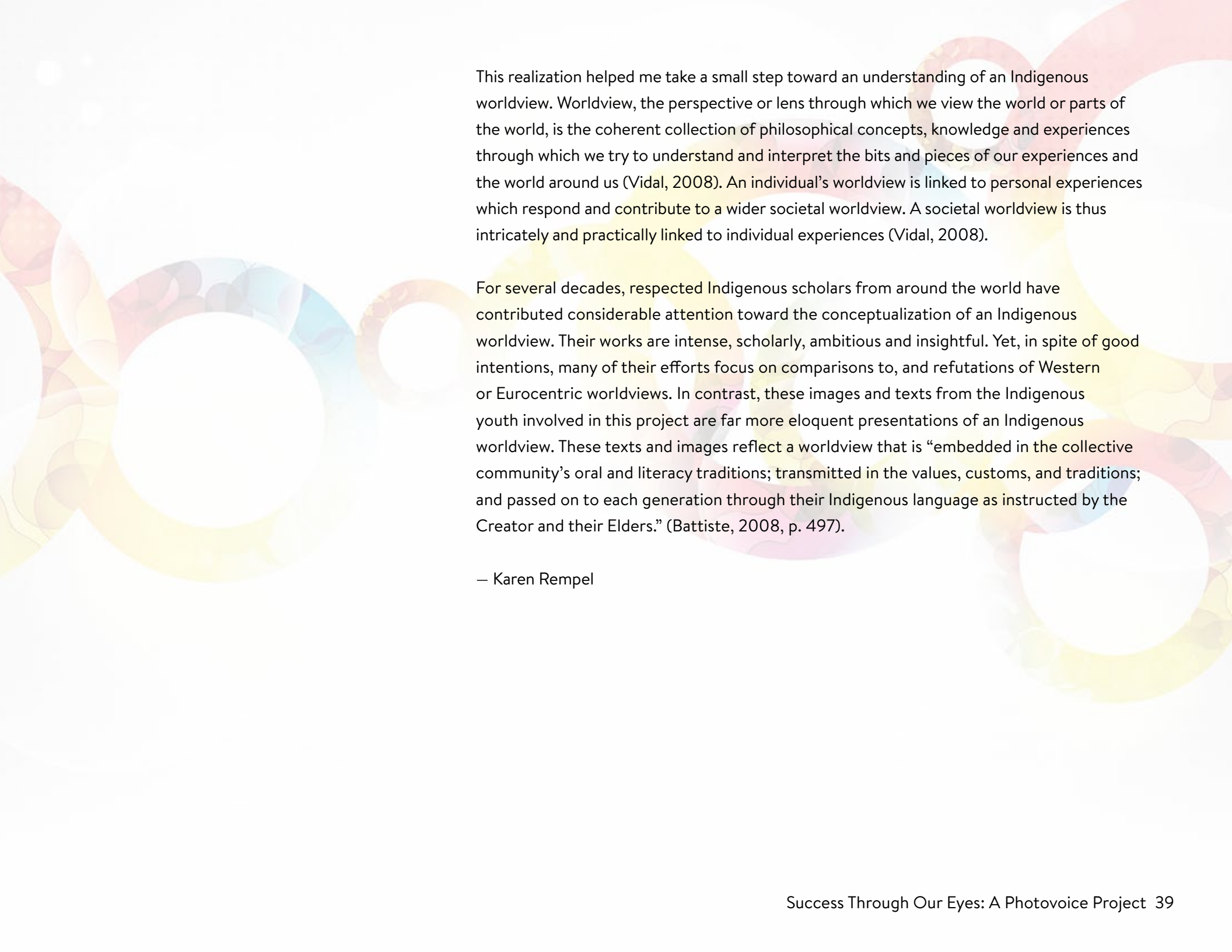
INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND WORLDVIEW

Understanding worldviews of both the targeted community and ourselves is imperative if we are going to do more good than harm. (Bishop, Higgins, Casella, & Contos, 2002, p. 611)

Photovoice is a multi-step, community-based participatory research (CBPR) process by which “people can identify, represent, and enhance their community” (Wang & Burris, 1997). My university colleagues and I, and a group of Indigenous youth began this particular photovoice research process with questions about educational success and leadership through the eyes of Indigenous youth leaders in Manitoba.

This booklet is the product of that multi-step CBPR process. There is no doubt that these images and narratives move us. They celebrate nature, families and life journeys. They also show the richness of Indigenous culture and the determination to achieve educational success and leadership.

But there is much more that lies beneath the surface of these images and texts. As I explored the images and texts, I came to the sudden—and embarrassing—realization that I had approached the research questions and analysis from a Eurocentric ideal of academic research. This Eurocentric ideal focuses on the quest for universal knowledge. In contrast, an Indigenous research paradigm values acquired knowledge and experiences embedded in Indigenous language, songs, stories, connection to the Land, and kinship relationships (Battiste, 2008; Hart, 2010).



This realization helped me take a small step toward an understanding of an Indigenous worldview. Worldview, the perspective or lens through which we view the world or parts of the world, is the coherent collection of philosophical concepts, knowledge and experiences through which we try to understand and interpret the bits and pieces of our experiences and the world around us (Vidal, 2008). An individual's worldview is linked to personal experiences which respond and contribute to a wider societal worldview. A societal worldview is thus intricately and practically linked to individual experiences (Vidal, 2008).

For several decades, respected Indigenous scholars from around the world have contributed considerable attention toward the conceptualization of an Indigenous worldview. Their works are intense, scholarly, ambitious and insightful. Yet, in spite of good intentions, many of their efforts focus on comparisons to, and refutations of Western or Eurocentric worldviews. In contrast, these images and texts from the Indigenous youth involved in this project are far more eloquent presentations of an Indigenous worldview. These texts and images reflect a worldview that is “embedded in the collective community’s oral and literacy traditions; transmitted in the values, customs, and traditions; and passed on to each generation through their Indigenous language as instructed by the Creator and their Elders.” (Battiste, 2008, p. 497).

– Karen Rempel

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